



# DISPATCH

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## Task Force Liberty, Iraqi Soldiers Share Success, Setback and Loss

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FORWARD OPERATING BASE SUMMERALL, Bayji, Iraq – Behind the walls of an old British fort here, and in the area around the base, a Pennsylvania Army National Guard unit with roots in the American Revolution is helping Iraq secure its own nationhood - by training, and fighting alongside its soldiers.

Through success, setback and loss, troops of Company A, 1st Battalion, 111th Infantry and Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division have shared the frustrations - and rewards - of this mission.

"They possess the willingness to be in the Iraqi army," said Sgt. James Mostiller, a Company A team leader from Philadelphia. "What they need is more help. One company is not going to do it for Bayji."

"Sometimes you'll train them on a task, and they don't seem to get it," said Staff Sgt. Jonathan Flynn, a Company A squad leader from Levittown, Pa. "Then you'll go out on a mission, and they'll do it perfectly. They'll surprise you sometimes."

The Iraqi troops use the training they receive in the fight against the insurgents. Almost

daily, the Iraqi and American soldiers mount humvees and pick-up trucks and roll out of the gate, departing the base to patrol, man traffic-control points, or check infrastructure like power lines - a new mission recently added to the soldiers' battery of tasks.

Company A began training and performing combat operations with the Iraqi soldiers last February. In May, they certified the Iraqi soldiers in squad-level missions, and now they're training them to take on platoon and company-level operations.

"It's frustrating, but you're taking people with literally no experience and training them to be platoon sergeants and squad leaders," said Staff Sgt. Chad Bruckner, a Company A squad leader from Horsham, Pa.

"At a squad level they perform pretty decently ... like building clearing, raids and that type of thing," Flynn said.

In March, with 1st Brigade Combat Team support, the Iraqi soldiers pulled off a two-pronged raid, netting both targets - a weapons cache and a known terrorist, said Bruckner.

"They hit the targets simultaneously," said Bruckner. "We got the man and we got the target. I thought, 'We can make a difference.'"

Other victories followed, including the capture of insurgent Samir Yasin Taha in July - a successful platoon-level operation owed entirely to Iraqi soldiering and leadership, Mostiller said.

"They led the briefing and led the patrol," Mostiller said. "We allowed them to do everything. They did a great job and



A Company C soldier bounds forward on a live-fire range at FOB Summerall. Iraqi and Task Force Liberty soldiers here conduct training in addition to combat operations such as patrols and traffic-control points in the area around the base.

accomplished the mission."

However, refining the Iraqi unit's ability to execute platoon and company-level operations has been hit by difficulties beyond either the American or Iraqi soldiers' control - like leadership changes, a developing logistics system and a fledgling Iraqi NCO corps.

"They still have a long way to go," Flynn said. "The NCO corps needs a lot of work. You can't build an American sergeant in a year, and you can't build an Iraqi sergeant in a year, either."

The state of the Iraqi NCO corps is part of Saddam Hussein's legacy, said Bruckner.

"The NCO corps is their biggest challenge," he said. "They have to step up and take responsibility."

"The biggest thing missing here is NCO leadership," said medic Sgt. Craig Fisher, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 103rd Armor. "They need to understand what the NCO-corps concept is - and use it."

Fisher, along with fellow unit member and medic Staff Sgt. Jon Siennick of Harrisburg, Pa., mans the aid station in the Iraqi Army compound within the base here - the old British fort where the Iraqi soldiers train and operate from. In addition to

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Soldiers of Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division conduct first-aid classes in the old British fort which serves as the Iraqi Army compound at FOB Summerall.

## Rebuilding Iraq, one province at a time

*Story and Photos by Sgt. Jennifer J. Eidson  
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FORWARD OPERATING BASE NORMANDY, Iraq – Task Force Liberty Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry are working with the people of the Diyala Province to build schools, improve the water supply, pave roads and rebuild their government.

The 3rd Brigade Combat Team Soldiers are providing Iraqis with money to improve their way of life and, routinely checking projects in Diyala Province to ensure they're on schedule.

"I think the projects in our [area of operations] are important," said 1st Lt. Jeremy Krueger, civil-military operations officer for the battalion, and native of Pensacola, Fla. "What we are doing is improving the infrastructure for this whole area that has been torn down over the last several years. It's helping the population immensely. It is providing new schools for them, new roads, new water projects, water supplies that they have never had and also some of the projects are businesses that are going to provide some revenue for the area."

The unit is still working on developing more projects in order to better the area, said Sgt.

Maj. Matthew J. West, civil-military operations sergeant major for Task Force 1-30 and a native of Dallas, Texas.

We have 83 projects that have been submitted or are currently underway, West said.

"Out of those, we have a variety of different types of projects. The majority of our projects right now (include) anywhere from 35 to 40 schools that are being rebuilt. We have a lot of water projects through three of our major cities and also sewage projects," he said.

Part of the unit's job is to help local leadership learn how to develop their infrastructure and run operations on their own, Krueger said.

"Every day that we go out and interact with the local governments, [we] try to show them that we are there to help," Krueger said. "At the same time, teach them how to solve problems and provide solutions on their own with less and less of our help." The democratic government is working well in the area, West added.



*Iraqis build a school in the Diyala Province. Task Force Liberty soldiers are working with the people of Diyala Province to build schools, improve the water supply, pave roads and rebuild local government.*

"The individuals know they have a right to vote," West said. "They are working on voting registration right now and, with the upcoming elections between the October and December time frame, I think we are going to have a good turn out. People understand that democracy in this area is going to be in the road ahead."

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creating medical records for the Iraqi soldiers, they conducted first-aid training and had tasks translated into Arabic.

"Everything we do here we do so the Iraqi soldiers can do it on their own," Siennick said. "People think Iraq is Arizona – it's not. There is no healthcare system here."

The medics recently certified nine Iraqi soldiers as combat life-savers. They plan to certify others, and are training combat medics, two of whom used the training to treat family members, Fisher said.

"That's very rewarding," he said. "They hugged me and thanked me." The Iraqi soldiers are very hungry for knowledge and very willing to learn, he added.

"They're excited Saddam Hussein is no longer here," he said. "They're not stupid – they just don't do things our way. They're willing to change. They just need help to do that."

Differing Iraqi dialects and tribal loyalties make training a challenge, the medics said. Company A soldiers use tribal conflicts among Iraqi troops as a teaching tool about unit loyalty, and though conflict has abated somewhat, it's an ongoing struggle, Fisher said.

"We tell them that the Iraqi army is a tribe and that they're a band of brothers," Fisher said. "It sounds like a cliché, but it's true."

Company A conducts remedial training at every opportunity, Bruckner said.

"These problems are not any more outlandish than in other armies," he said. "They may need more work, but their problems are no different."

"The American soldiers keep repeating the same information until they're sure we've got the picture," said Staff Sgt. Jamal Achmed, of Company C. "It's not a problem. We train, rehearse, then apply what we learn on the

streets of Bayji."

Lanky and confident, Achmed sports a wide grin when he talks. He is 21 years old and joined the Iraqi army early this year.

"I like the army," he said. "All my friends are here in this company. We get great joy from training together and fighting the insurgency together." He was promoted quickly, he added, because he picked up the training fast.

"NCOs guarantee the flow of information in the chain of command," he said. "The NCOs make sure the soldiers get the information and also make sure they're applying it."

He observes his soldiers' strengths and weaknesses so he "can correct them and show them how to do things," he added.

It's easy to lead, and an honor, said Company C soldier Cpl. Nazhan Ali.

"I am showing my skills and doing my duty for Bayji," he said.

Shbat, also 21 years old, is part of Company C's recently formed quick-reaction force, or QRF – an essential tool in low-intensity conflicts such as Iraq, and, like the training of medics and combat life-savers, another step forward.

"If [the patrols] see anything suspicious, or get attacked, we are ready to go, all the time," Shbat said.

Mostiller said he is proud of the Iraqi soldiers, and laments that they have to cover their faces while on patrol.

"It's easy for me to be a soldier because I don't live in the towns I patrol," said Mostiller. "They have a lot of spirit and heart. It's a shame that they have to cover their faces for fear that they or their families will be attacked."

Some of the Iraqi soldiers are poor, some are farmers, Bruckner said – but they joined the army to defend their country.

"They believe in doing something greater," he said.

The American and Iraqi soldiers get along well, Ali said.

"We are friends and we are joking with each other all the time," he said.

Some of the Americans have learned Arabic words, Achmed said, and soldiers of both nations also communicate with gestures and tones.

"They know what we mean without translation," Achmed said.

"I've gotten pretty close to Iraqi army soldiers," said Bruckner. "The other guys bust on me for hanging out with them, but I have a lot in common with them. They ask me about America and I ask them about their homes in Bayji. They're friendly and outgoing, and that's the way I am. They're very giving. I admire them as well."

Both units have suffered casualties. In August, Company A lost four soldiers in an IED attack.

"They came to do this mission, and we leave the base to do missions together," Achmed said. "This is enough to create a strong relationship between us."

Company A's organic unit stateside is 1st Battalion, 111th Infantry, originally organized by American founding father Benjamin Franklin. The mission here continues, despite difficulties and the loss of both Iraqi and American soldiers. Being part of "the main focus here" is rewarding, Flynn said.

"The goal is to help build a country and build their army," Flynn said. "We've actually taken part in that."

"We all believe in the mission," said Bruckner. "We all put in extra hours."

"We're trying to get as much experience as we can from the American Army," said Achmed, "because they are not going to be here forever."